

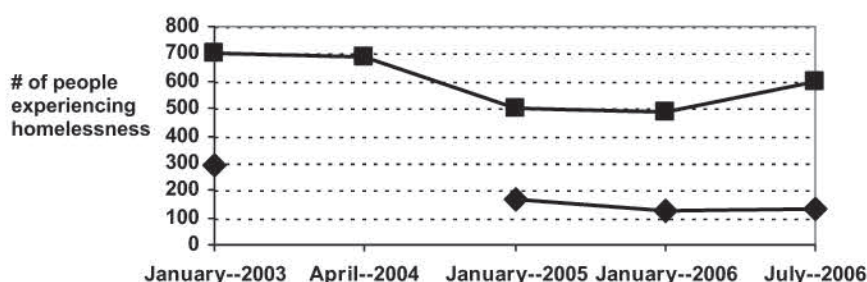
Asheville-Buncombe County's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness

HOMELESS INITIATIVE PROGRESS REPORT 2006

How Many People Experience Homelessness in our Community?

There is no easy answer to this question. In most cases, homelessness is a temporary circumstance, not permanent condition. The A HOPE Center, which provides daily respite, phone access, mail pickup, showers, and storage, reports that over the course of this last year, 2084¹ individuals were served. A joint task force made up of the three largest shelters in Asheville-Buncombe County (ABCCM, Salvation Army, and WNC Rescue Mission) reported that in 2005, there were 709 individuals served, with a total of 45,998 overnight stays at the 300+ beds.²

Formal "Point-In-Time" counts conducted by the Asheville-Buncombe Homeless Coalition have shown that there are over 500 individuals/families in our community who are experiencing homelessness at any one time. Below is a chart which shows results from the Point In Time count over the past few years:



Percent of those experiencing chronic homelessness compared to total number of people experiencing homelessness:

January 2003	42%
April 2004	N/A
January 2005	34%
January 2006	25%
July 2006	22%

Who is Homeless?

There is not one specific person who can represent everyone who is homeless. Just like people who have homes, people who are experiencing homelessness face a variety of other life challenges, from health problems to substance abuse. Unfortunately, the challenges people face that are often compounded by the experience of homelessness, and can seem extreme to both the person and observers.

The Opposite of Homelessness is Having a Home. Period.

Needing shelter is a natural part of the human experience. Everyone seeks shelter. Having a home provides people the opportunity to have a stable, consistent environment that allows for everything from daily hygiene to a place to keep and receive important documents that is needed for employment, vehicle ownership, and more.

Homelessness is not a constant state. Instead, is the result of a lack of resources or lack of access to resources. People may lose housing, but with the community supports, it can become an episode in their life rather than a constant state of existence.

If the opposite of homelessness is having a home, then the solution is to provide people with a homes. Once a person is in a stable environment—permanent housing—additional personal problems that may affect access to resources and stability can then be addressed through support services. Often, challenges that people face can take a lifetime of work to address. People cannot wait their whole life for a home because they have not solved all of their problems. When afforded self-determination and support, people are successful at maintaining housing.

Asheville-Buncombe County's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness

STRATEGIES

What is the Homeless Initiative?

With the support of many community members and under the leadership of Affordable Housing Coalition, which is the lead agency for the project, the Homeless Initiative was born.

The Homeless Initiative is a collaborative effort of service agencies, civic leaders, business leaders, state agencies, faith groups, advocates, and individuals who are experiencing homelessness. The efforts of the Homeless Initiative are based on the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. Using the plan as a blueprint, the collaborative works to:

- Reduce the number of people who become homeless.
- Increase the number of homeless people placed into permanent housing.
- Decrease the length and disruption of homeless episodes, and
- Provide community-based services and supports that prevent homelessness before it happens and/or limit opportunities for homelessness to reoccur.

Meeting the goals in The 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness is a substantial undertaking. It will necessitate continued commitment from our local and state elected officials, human service providers, the private sector, faith based entities, and residents from throughout our city and county to be successful.

Strategies to End Homelessness

- Identify a lead agency to coordinate implementation of the plan and be accountable to the community.
- Implement the goals and actions in Asheville-Buncombe County's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness following the guiding principles in the Plan.
- Maintain an Advisory Workgroup and several other issues-specific workgroups which meet on a regular basis to centralize information, evaluate outcomes and guide the direction of the implementation of the Plan.
- Develop and support a homeless management information system (HMIS) which can provide detailed and accurate information pertaining to the needs of people experiencing homelessness in Asheville-Buncombe and provide for greater collaboration between agencies.
- Foster and invest in solutions-oriented events, programs, agencies, and housing development projects that look to end homelessness and support individuals and families in obtaining & maintaining appropriate housing.

Asheville-Buncombe County's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness

OUTCOMES

Leading the Way: Designation of a Lead Entity

The Affordable Housing Coalition of Asheville and Buncombe County was chosen to be the lead entity for the implementation of the 10-Year Plan because of the agency's established relationship with service providers, funders, elected officials, law enforcement agencies, and other stakeholders. Subsequently, a coordinator was hired with expertise in grant writing, management, homelessness, and mainstream resources.

Buncombe County and the City of Asheville joined together to fund the coordinator position. In addition, the City of Asheville gave financial support that has allowed Pisgah Legal services to hire an additional staff attorney to work on homeless prevention as well as expand the homeless prevention project and a disability assistance project for people who experience homelessness.

Opening the Back Door, 2005-2006 Goal: Provide Housing First accommodation to 30 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness

There has been an increase in Permanent Housing by 45 Units

Shelter Plus added 12 new units. Shelter Plus Care is a program designed to support individuals with Mental Health disabilities. These various programs work together to provide housing & supportive services. HUD Continuum of Care grants as well as local and state funding account for a majority of the funding Shelter Plus Care Receives.

This fall, the opening of the Woodfin & Griffin Housing First Apartments will add 33 new units. The Woodfin and Griffin are two new developments funded through a combination of local, state, and federal funding. Coordination with Mountain Housing Opportunities, the Housing Authority, Clay and Harris property management companies, and Hospitality House has created a dynamic Housing First program for 33 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. Individuals will be responsible for rent, either through employment or state & federal entitlements and will have supportive services worker who will help them access the services they need to maintain their home. This project will be evaluated by a doctorate student from UNC Chapel Hill, and is part of a larger study involving another city in North Carolina.

Developing the Infrastructure, 2005-2006 Goal: Develop the Homeless Information Management System (HMIS)

- Asheville–Buncombe has a representative sitting on the North Carolina Housing Information Network (CHIN) Steering Committee.
- The HMIS System went on-line for use in May, 2006.
- 6 agencies are currently registered and have staff trained to use HMIS. A relationship exists between local HMIS representatives and state HMIS administrators; technical support and additional training are ongoing.

Asheville-Buncombe County's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness

GET INVOLVED!

www.abchomeless.org

There are many people, businesses, agencies, and programs working to end homelessness in Asheville and Buncombe County. If you want to get involved, read below for just a few of the many ways you can do it!

Public Sector

- Expedite review process, reduction of development fees, and other programs to reduce regulatory barriers to develop affordable housing.
- Develop incentives that encourage for-profit developers to build affordable housing.

Educational Institutions

- Conduct community forums and educational seminars.
- Offer classes to educate people about the homeless issue.
- Develop volunteer teams to undertake projects such as tutoring or recreating with homeless children or landscaping homeless facilities.

Health Care Institutions

- Develop substance abuse in-patient and out-patient treatment programs targeted at homeless people
- Participate in the development and implementation of a community standard for discharge planning that allows those discharged from health care institutions to obtain and maintain permanent housing.
- Design case management strategies targeted to homeless individuals including preventive care, medication management, and coordination of support services such as transportation to medical appointments.

Business Community

- Be open to consideration of hiring this special population.
- Review hiring screening policies and create a pilot program to hire formerly homeless people.
- Consider offering a living wage.

Financial Institutions

- Provide financial literacy education to residents of emergency shelters and transitional housing programs.
- Establish individual development accounts (IDA's) to allow low income families to save for a first home.
- Provide financial support for home-builders to build permanent housing projects for people at risk of homelessness.

Civic and Professional Groups

- Serve as advocates on behalf of those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and help educate the public.
- Collaborate and coordinate advocacy and community education efforts with similar groups.
- Create programs that provide mentoring, tutoring, and training necessary for acquiring skills for success in residing in permanent housing situations.

Individuals

- Adopt a family or household.
- Become a volunteer role model.
- Become involved with local neighborhood associations and civic groups and support their advocacy efforts to work to address housing

Faith-Based Institutions

- Increase volunteerism in coordination/ collaboration with multiple community resources to achieve effective partnerships.
- Provide scholarships earmarked for continuing education for homeless or formerly homeless children.
- Provide transportation services to facilitate employment and access to critical service needs.

Nonprofit Service Providers

- Assure that case-management and supportive services accompany emergency assistance.
- Develop a communication and education plan to disseminate information for key organizations that are positioned to interact with families and individuals who are at-risk of homelessness.
- Develop a community standard for discharge planning to a system of care that leads to the identification of a primary support person and/or agency.

Another way to get involved: The Homeless Initiative holds monthly workgroup meetings in the areas of Advisory, Housing, Services, Discharge, Prevention, and Feedback. Everyone is welcome to attend. To learn more, go to www.abchomeless.org.



Do you want to know about what homeless resources exist in Asheville-Buncombe? Are you looking for a volunteer opportunity? Call United Way's 211: A free, local community service information line. Dial 2-1-1 (252-HELP) or visit www.211wnc.org



¹ Basic Homeless Information, A-HOPE

² Joint Task Force on Homelessness Education and Strategies 5/9/06